

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00  
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01  
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /059 W  
-----100130 271646Z /46

R 271619Z JUN 77  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5579  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN  
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE  
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY ROME  
USMISSION NATO  
AMCONSUL BELFAST  
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY  
USOECN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, PINT, UK, EC  
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT PUBLISHES DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL

REF: LONDON 9853

SUMMARY - THE GOVERNMENT JUNE 24 PUBLISHED ITS LONG-  
AWAITED BILL FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN  
ASSEMBLY. IT CONTAINED NO SURPRISES. ALTHOUGH  
RECOMMENDING THE REGIONAL LIST SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL  
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REPRESENTATION (PR), THE BILL WAS DRAFTED SO THAT THE  
TRADITIONAL BRITISH FIRST-PAST-THE-POST (FPTP) ELEC-  
TORAL SYSTEM CAN BE ADOPTED AND INCORPORATED IN THE  
BILL BY A SINGLE AMENDMENT. EC ELECTIONS IN BRITAIN  
BEFORE 1980, HOWEVER, SEEM UNLIKELY. THE GOVERNMENT'S  
RECOMMENDATION OF A PR SYSTEM, TOGETHER WITH THE FACT  
THAT THE BILL WILL HAVE TO BE CARRIED OVER TO THE NEXT

SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, PROVIDES A STRONG INCENTIVE FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY TO RENEW ITS PACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT THIS FALL. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT JUNE 24 PUBLISHED ITS BILL PROVIDING FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF DELAY AND EQUIVOCATION, DUE PARTICULARLY TO ELECTORAL SYSTEM ISSUE AND TO DIVISIONS WITHIN THE CABINET. WITH CALLAGHAN'S EARLIER DECISION TO ALLOW A FREE VOTE ON THE PRINCIPLE OF DIRECT ELECTIONS AS WELL AS THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM (REFTEL), THESE PROBLEMS WERE OVERCOME. THE BILL IS EXPECTED TO BE INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT THIS WEEK, BUT IT STANDS NO REAL CHANCE OF PASSAGE IN THE CURRENT SESSION -- PARLIAMENT IS EXPECTED TO RISE IN MID-JULY AND RETURN FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS IN MID-OCTOBER TO CONCLUDE LEGISLATION THAT IS NOW IN ADVANCED STAGES. THE DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL, ACCORDINGLY, WILL HAVE TO BE REINTRODUCED WHEN THE NEXT SESSION OPENS IN NOVEMBER, THOUGH SOME INITIAL STAGES OF COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION WILL NOT HAVE TO BE REPEATED.

2. THE DRAFT BILL CONTAINED NO SURPRISES, GENERALLY FOLLOWING THE GOVERNMENT'S ORIGINAL WHITE PAPER PROPOSALS. AS EXPECTED (REFTEL AND PREVIOUS), THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO RECOMMEND ADOPTION OF THE REGIONAL LIST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PR SYSTEM, BUT STRUCTURED THE BILL AND ITS SUPPLEMENTARY SCHEDULES IN SUCH A WAY THAT PARLIAMENT CAN ADOPT THE TRADITIONAL FPTP ELECTORAL SYSTEM BY SIMPLE AMENDMENT. WITH BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY COMMITTED TO A FREE VOTE ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM, THE ODDS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY IN FAVOR OF

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EVENTUAL ADOPTION OF FPTP.

3. IF IT IS ASSUMED THAT PARLIAMENT WILL ADOPT THE FPTP ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND APPROVE THE BILL AROUND THE NEW YEAR' THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE OF BRITAIN BEING PREPARED TO HOLD ELECTIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY MUCH BEFORE L980. THIS DELAY IS INHERENT IN THE FPTP SYSTEM WHICH INVOLVES A LABORIOUS PROCESS OF DRAWING UP 81 RELATIVELY BALANCED GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTITUENCIES AND AN ELABORATE, TWO-TIER SYSTEM PERMITTING THE VARIOUS PARTIES TO APPEAL THE MAKE-UP OF THESE CONSTITUENCIES.

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4. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THE DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL WILL PROVIDE A STRONG INCENTIVE FOR THE LIBERALS - WHO PLACE THE HIGHEST PRIORITY ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION -- TO RENEW THEIR CURRENT PACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT LATER THIS YEAR. ALTHOUGH THE LIBERALS CANNOT REALISTICALLY EXPECT PARLIAMENT TO APPROVE PR. PARTY LEADER STEEL CAN CLAIM SUCCESS IN BRINGING THE ISSUE BEFORE PARLIAMENT, AN ACHIEVEMENT WITHOUT PRECEDENT. SINCE THE BILL WILL CARRY OVER INTO THE NEXT SESSION, STEEL WILL BE ABLE TO GO BEFORE THE ANNUAL LIBERAL CONFERENCE IN SEPTEMBER WITH A STRONG ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF RENEWAL OF THE ACCORD WITH THE

GOVERNMENT. AND IF THE DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL IS AN  
EFFECTIVE CARROT, THE PROSPECT OF A GENERAL ELECTION MUST  
BE AN EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE STICK.

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Subject:** GOVERNMENT PUBLISHES DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL  
**TAGS:** PFOR, PGOV, PINT, UK, EC  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009